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Arts: Policy and Talking Points (1994): Article 02

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ALLIANCE FACT SHEET

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ARTS AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

ADVOCATES FOR THE ARTS

Member Organizations:

American
Symphony
Orchestra
League

Association
of Art
Museum
Directors

Association
of Performing
Arts
Presenters

Dance/USA

OPERA
America

Theatre
Communications
Group

Representing
2,600 Non-profit
Arts Institutions

- * On a national level, nonprofit arts institutions and organizations generate an estimated \$37 billion in economic activity and return \$3.4 billion in federal income taxes to the U.S. Treasury each year.
- * The arts create jobs, increase the local tax base, boost tourism, spur growth in related businesses (e.g. hotels, restaurants, printing, etc.) and improve the overall quality of life for our cities and towns.
- * For every dollar the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) invests in communities, there is a 20-fold return in jobs, services and contracts.
- * Last year, \$123 million in NEA grants leveraged more than \$1.3 billion in private and public matching funds. These public-private partnerships stimulate a significant return on a small investment, thus emphasizing the importance of federal funding to help nonprofit arts organizations generate revenue.
- * Endowment dollars attract \$11 and more for the arts from state, regional and local arts agencies, foundations, corporations, businesses and individuals.
- * More than 1.3 million Americans are employed in the not-for-profit arts industry.
- * The National Endowment for the Arts costs each American only \$.64 per year.
- * A recent poll indicated that a full 60 percent of the American people believe that "the federal government should provide financial assistance to arts organizations, such as art museums, dance, opera, theater groups, and symphony orchestras." Almost as many, 56 percent, say they "would be willing to pay \$15 more in their own taxes per year to support federal government efforts in the arts."
- * Private donations (which vary from year to year) or increased ticket prices (which would undermine arts institutions' mission to reach a broader audience) will not be able to replace a loss of federal funding.

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Last spring, Goals 2000: Educate America Act, a new set of national standards for education was signed into law by President Clinton. The standards, which include the arts as part of the recommended core curriculum, are voluntary and national in name only, but a step in the right direction. In mid-September, a second step was taken by the American Council for the Arts (ACA) when it convened leaders from business, education, government and the arts to discuss the critical role arts education can play in workforce readiness. The conference, Arts Education for the 21st Century American Economy, established time and again why it is essential that our children receive an education in the arts if we as a nation are to compete in the global economy.

And yet, across the country arts programs in the schools are being cut or eliminated altogether, and it's a disgrace. We are cheating our children.

I grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My father worked with his father in a family-owned electrical supply business, McCullough Electric, now run by my brother George. I began public school, in kindergarten, in 1938.

Like McCullough Electric, the Linden Avenue School is still in business. We had music at Linden School. In fact, we had music several times a week in a room reserved for music. We played tambourines, wood-blocks, and the triangle. We sang, learning by heart most of Stephen Foster, who came from Pittsburgh. There was a school orchestra, in which

my oldest brother played the violin. There was an auditorium with a stage and real pull curtains, and we were all in plays, the whole way along. There was an art room and an art teacher, Miss Bridgewater, and the day she took her chalk and with a few fast strokes demonstrated two-point perspective on the blackboard, is one I've never forgotten. She had performed pure magic right before our eyes. I had to be able to do that. I had to learn how. I began drawing and painting and I'm still at it at every possible chance.

Art, music, science, history, putting on plays—it was all part of school and childhood, and I loved school, almost every day. There was never a thought that the arts were frills. Or that everyone had to stay stuck in the same interests, at school or at home. My brother Hax had his music; George, engineering; I had my painting; brother Jim, astronomy. We were not rich. I suppose we could be described as comfortable. And while my father and mother willingly paid for paints and music lessons, concert tickets and the like, it was really at school that we got the bug, got the chance, and I say this because I think it so important to understand that it is not just economically deprived children who benefit from school libraries, from arts programs, from community commitment to the arts for children, and to argue for support of the arts on that basis primarily is to miss the point. All boats rise with the incoming tide.

But how does this kind of an education in the arts translate into the economically competitive work force I mentioned earlier? Consider the astonishing transformation of Chrysler Corporation. In less than three years Chrysler went from being the "basket case" of

the American automobile industry to "leading the resurgence" of the American automobile industry. And the reason? Design. Inspired design. The "alchemy of design," as *The New York Times* reported. If there are heroes to the story they are Chrysler's vice president in charge of design, Tom Gale, and his extraordinary young staff. And yes, Gale remembers being inspired first by a fourth-grade art teacher. Designer Michael Santoro remembers looking down from a seventh-floor window at New York City's High School of Art and Design and studying the cars waiting at the red light. "You look out the window and all the cars look the same," he told a reporter for the *Times*. "I said, 'If I ever get the chance, my car's going to look different'"

The nation needs artists and designers to work in the automobile industry, in advertising, publishing, fashion, interior design, television, the movies. And musicians and singers and dancers and actors for all the so-called entertainment industry. And teachers. And teachers to teach teachers.

Talent doesn't just happen. Training, craft, experience can't be summoned willy-nilly out of nowhere as needed. It has to be developed, brought out, brought along with education. And the process has to begin early. The earlier the better.

The arts, as Fred Rogers says, give children ways to say who they are, how they feel, to say whether they are happy or sad or angry, and without hurting anyone.

The late Margaret McFarlan, professor of child development at the University of Pittsburgh and an inspiration for three generations of specialists in child studies, including

Fred Rogers, liked to say:

We don't teach children. We just give them who we are. And they catch that. Attitudes are caught, not taught. If you love something in front of a child, the child will catch that.

So what is our attitude to be here in America? What do we love? What do we want our children to see that we love?

And who will be the leaders with both the spirit and courage of a Theodore Roosevelt, who loved the poetry of Edward Arlington Robinson and on hearing that Robinson was in financial straits, found him a job in the Treasury, then sent him a note saying, "Think poetry first, Treasury second."

I am an optimist, by nature and from reading history. I am also of that generation raised on the belief that we Americans can do anything we set our hearts and minds to. I still believe that.

Following up on its national arts education conference, the American Council for the Arts is continuing to lead the discussion of why teaching the arts in our schools is so vitally necessary. This is a cause worth setting our hearts and minds to.

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About David McCullough

David McCullough, Pulitzer Prize winning historian, was the American Council for the Arts' 1994 Nancy Hanks Lecturer on Arts Public Policy.

Mr. McCullough is the author of six widely acclaimed works of history and biography, including the best-selling *Truman*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1993. To millions of television viewers, Mr. McCullough is known as host of the PBS series "The American Experience," and as the narrator for such distinguished documentaries as *LBJ*, *The Donner Party*, and *The Civil War*.